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**Technology-Rich Learning**

## Skyping Their Way

*Douglas Elmendorf and Shannon Harzarik*

**Kindergartners in Maryland and Hawaii shared digital stories—and appreciation for each other's cultures—through Skype.**

At Chase Elementary School in Baltimore County, Maryland, we believe it's never too early to start preparing children for cultural proficiency. Recently, our kindergarten students embarked on an adventure in cultural proficiency with their counterparts at Kamehameha Schools Hawaii Elementary School in Hawaii.

Our kindergartners used creative writing and Skype to develop a stronger understanding of their own community and an awareness of the culture of kindergartners living 5,000 miles away. The Hawaiian 5-year-olds did likewise.

## The Mitten, the Skipjack, and the Boogie Board

Jan Brett's picture book *The Mitten* was our jumping off point for sharing. In the story, various animals crawl one-by-one into a white mitten to get warm. The Chase kindergarten students rewrote the tale to reflect distinctive elements of Maryland's culture in a book they called *The Skipjack*. In their collective story, a raven, an oriole, and other Maryland-related characters seek shelter on a lost skipjack, the Maryland state boat, because their habitats have been damaged in a storm.

At the same time, the Hawaiian kindergartners rewrote *The Mitten* to reflect animals, places, and features of Hawaii in their story, *The Boogie Board*. The two classes first got to know one another briefly by introducing themselves and chatting through Skype; then, they approached *The Mitten*. In the Hawaiian students' story, a young boy named Kahili lost his boogie board and many native Hawaiian animals—such as a starfish, a dolphin, and a shark—found the board and played on it. This project was one of many at Kamehameha Elementary School, which has conducted student exchanges across U.S. states and other countries, through digital tools, for years, incorporating all their grade levels. The school actually exchanged digital tales based on *The Mitten* with kindergartners in a Florida school as well as with our school.

Chase's technology integration teacher worked with students to research animals indigenous to Maryland, using online resources such as [Brain Pop, Jr.](#) and [World Book Kids](#). The teacher divided students into pairs and assigned each pair an animal on which that duo would become experts. Each pair accessed high-quality photos and videos of its creature through technology-based resources like [Safari Montage](#) to determine what physical attributes to include in the text and illustrations.

Students then came back together to explore online maps (using the [National Geographic Education site](#)). That helped them choose specific locations throughout Maryland in which their story would take place. They enjoyed making connections between places with which they were familiar—such as the vacation spot Ocean City—and state parks and waterways that were new to them.

After the students wrote and digitally illustrated the story using software called Pixie, and they put the project together using Microsoft Photo Story. Both digital stories are viewable online: [The Skipjack](#) and [The Boogie Board](#).

## Sharing Through Skype

Kindergartners from both schools shared their creations through Skype. Each class viewed a peer's story ahead of time to help develop questions in preparation for their Skype session. The Maryland and Hawaiian students then asked their peers in the other state questions about how they created their story and what their communities were like. After explaining traditions like eating crabs and attending Orioles baseball games, the Maryland kids could immediately see and hear responses from the Hawaiian kids. The Hawaiian kids noted that although they don't have a major league baseball team, they enjoy eating crabs; a discussion ensued comparing Maryland blue crabs and Kona crabs.

The Chase Elementary students sang their version of the song *Down by the Bay*, with new lyrics that described the uniqueness of the Chesapeake Bay and its importance to the Maryland ecosystem. The Hawaiian children sang a song in the Hawaiian language. The revelation that the Hawaiian alphabet has 13 letters, not 26, sparked vigorous dialogue. The session ended as the new friends promised to "meet" again as soon as possible. They are already planning a follow-up collaboration using [VoiceThread](#).

Parents and community members were invited to watch the Skyping session. Many were excited that the school was using technology to expose students to children from other backgrounds. One parent said her daughter talked about the experience for the week leading up to the interaction and the entire week after.

This experience inspired these 5-year-olds as writers. The tangible audience gave them an authentic purpose for writing, and they continue to talk about writing adventures they'd like to experience.

Using education-related websites and Skype enabled our students to engage in reciprocal relationships with students living a great distance away. We believe that creatively using technology in the schoolhouse will help educators fashion learning environments in which students will acquire the skills they need to navigate colleges and careers.

[Douglas Elmendorf](#) is principal and [Shannan Harzarik](#) is technology integration teacher at Chase Elementary School in Baltimore County, Maryland.

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